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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001355

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MUTHANNA GOV URGES US ROLE IN ELECTIONS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Patricia A. Butenis for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/REL MCFI) Summary: Governor Ahmed Marzook is deeply concerned about Iranian efforts to influence the October 2008 provincial elections. He believes U.S. moral support could help counter Tehran's attempt to stack the political deck. Marzook's role as an independent likely colors his alarmist thinking. Nonetheless, we have heard from multiple independent sources about the nature and extent of Iranian efforts to manipulate the outcome of the October elections, which, as Marzook correctly notes, will shape the political scene in southern Iraq for the next several years. End Summary.

#### OCTOBER ELECTIONS WILL REDRAW THE POLITICAL MAP

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¶2. (S/REL MCFI) Poloff joined Muthanna Team Leader in a wide-ranging April 23 discussion with Governor Ahmed Marzook on issues surrounding upcoming provincial elections. Marzook, who is an independent, advocated a federal system led by nationalists as the best guarantee of Iraqi stability. "The most important thing is that the people elect nationalists," Marzook emphasized. "I've met Prime Minister Maliki several times, and he is a nationalist at heart who loves his country, even if he is surrounded by others with ties to Iran." Marzook believed that the elections, which would decide the quality and type of government for the next several years, offered an opportunity to "redraw the political map" and prevent Iraq from being torn apart. However, he warned that if the elections were mismanaged, "you will lose a lot."

#### IRANIAN INFLUENCE IS WIDESPREAD

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¶3. (S/REL MCFI) Marzook cleared the room of all but his closest advisor to discuss his concerns about what he perceives as widespread Iranian influence. Asked to provide tangible examples of Iranian support, Marzook laughed and said "What do you want? All the major political parties receive support from Iran!" Iranian intelligence networks were "invisible," but omnipresent throughout southern Iraq, he alleged. Referring to improvised explosive devices, Marzook said, "Every one of these weapons says Made in Iran.,"

¶4. (S/REL MCFI) Marzook claimed the Iranians would use money and influence to shape the outcome of the elections, saying, "They're putting more effort into these elections than they are into the ones back home." The ultimate Iranian goal, Marzook believed, was the creation of a southern Shi'a region that would fall under Tehran's influence. "This would be a dangerous thing," he said, and would lead to open Sunni-Shi'a civil war and "a struggle between Iranian and Saudi proxies."

U.S. MORAL SUPPORT COULD HELP LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

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¶5. (S/REL MCFI) Marzook emphasized the need for U.S. intervention in the elections to counter Iranian interference. While the U.S. might not be able to match the Iranians in terms of providing direct support to candidates, it could help level the playing field by providing moral backing to politicians who wanted an independent Iraq. In Muthanna, for example, the tribes were organized and in control. By reaching out to them, it would be easy to identify candidates who had love of country at heart. "People will say, the Americans support me and my positions -- that's enough." Marzook did not think there would be a public backlash to U.S. support for candidates, saying "We know you have your interests and we have ours, but we can benefit from each other."

¶6. (S/REL MCFI) Without such U.S. intervention, Marzook feared the worst from the elections, saying that the balance of power and the future of the south was at stake. "Ten years from now you will be wondering, 'What was I doing at the time; how did the Iranians manage to do it?' He concluded, "You freed us from the tyranny of Saddam, and spent much of your blood here. Don't waste this opportunity."

¶7. (S/REL MCFI) Comment: Marzook's role as an independent likely colors his alarmist thinking and concrete evidence of Iranian intervention (other than weapons) remains elusive. Nonetheless, we have heard from multiple independent sources about the nature and extent of Iranian efforts to manipulate the outcome of the October 2008 elections, which, as Marzook correctly notes, will shape the political scene in southern

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Iraq for the next several years. End Comment.  
BUTENIS